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AMERICAN NOTES

White House Christmas

Americans rarely get a close-up look inside the Executive Mansion. Harry Truman showed television viewers around the newly renovated White House in 1952; since then, Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson and Tricia Nixon have taken the nation on similarly memorable televised tours. This Christmas season, CBS cameramen and reporters were allowed into the secluded second-floor family living quarters to record White House preparations for the holidays. Viewers will see the Nixons' private tree; they will watch as Son-in-Law Eddie Cox is welcomed for his first Christmas at the White House, and get an unusual peek into the First Family's album of Christmases past. Most remarkable, however, is the spectacle of a nattily dressed Richard Nixon romping on the sitting-room floor with his dogs, King Timahoe, an Irish setter, Vicky, a gray miniature poodle and Pasha, a Yorkshire terrier. The President, doubtless mindful of the outcry when his predecessor tugged on canine ears, scrupulously confined his gestures of affection toward King Timahoe to playful pats.

Huey Newton Freed

More than four years ago, Oakland Police Officer John Frey died on a main thoroughfare of four bullet wounds. Charged with his murder was Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the then fledgling, largely unknown Black Panther Party. In the intervening years, Newton was convicted, spent 33 months in prison, had his conviction overturned on appeal, and had hung juries force two mistrials. With the last mistrial, Alameda County authorities dropped all charges against Newton. The radical chant "Free Huey!" has at last passed into history.

Before the chant died, however, Newton and the Black Panthers had become an almost mythic element in the conflict that separates black American from white, the dissenters from the accepting. For a time, depending upon the point of view, Newton was either a radical martyr or a symbol of the winds of destruction. In the end, he was both and he was neither; symbolism overtook reality. In the passions on both sides, there were but few who remembered the death of one man, or the four years of anguish and uncertainty suffered by another man charged with that death.

Fireman's Holiday

In the firehouses of Norman Rockwell's bucolic America, firemen passed the hours between alarms playing checkers and showing off the polished brass and bright red trucks to wide-eyed young visitors. But for the volunteer firemen of Genoa, Texas, in suburban Houston, that was not enough. In the past three years, eight bored Genoa firemen have set about 40 fires in abandoned buildings and grass fields. As soon as the blazes were going, the arsonists would dash back to the firehouse and rush off to put out their own fires.

The Genoa firemen were quite busy until they made the mistake of setting fire to a barn owned by the brother of a Houston fire department official. An investigation of the blaze led to the Genoa firehouse, and the overeager fire fighters were exposed. Explained one of the firemen charged last week with arson: "We'd hang around the station on the night shift without a thing to do. We just wanted to get the red light flashing and the bells clanging."

Tax Heaven

The name itself, Rolling Meadows, is redolent of Elysium. For its taxpayers, Rolling Meadows, Ill., is heaven: the city property tax has been abolished. The small (pop. 19,000) Chicago suburb is a beneficiary of an Illinois law that allows municipalities to collect a portion of state sales tax on goods billed within the community. With the $1.2 million collected each year on the sales of products of such corporate neighbors as Western Electric and Hallicrafters, which have sales offices there, Rolling Meadows does better than make ends meet.

The city has put its policemen in air-conditioned patrol cars, abated $115,000 in municipal library taxes, built a $350,000 addition to its city hall and started work on a $5,000,000 program for water-system improvements. But the most unusual advancement is one of the country's finest fleets of garbage trucks: four Mercedes-Benz trash haulers that cost $23,000 each. Can Rolls-Royce buses be far behind?

You should have stayed!

CBS NEWS